



# NEWS AND VIEWS

VVA # 223

THE REDWOOD EMPIRE CHAPTER



Volume 16, Issue 8

PLEASE SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER WITH OTHER VETERANS

SEPTEMBER 2014



*Fred Ptucha*



*Jeannette Dothee*

*Photography  
by  
Jeannette Dothee*



*Mark O'Conner*



## Veterans returning to Vietnam

by Mike Hart



**Mike Hart**

If you have ever thought of returning to places in Vietnam where you were located during your tour(s) of duty, you're not the only one. Whether it's because of curiosity, guilt or you just want to actually know just where you were located, many of us want to

make the trek back.

There is a local group from Garberville, CA with coordinators and trainers in Sonoma County, that have been forming teams and taking workers over to Nam to build schools, medical clinics and housing for the regular folks.

This effort started when a Vietnam vet named Freddy Champagne from Mendocino County, in 1988 formed the Veterans Vietnam Restoration Project (VVRP). "I wanted to break down the (visitor) embargo in Nam to work on healing my Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My goal was to discover the Vietnam people as a people, not just an enemy," explained Champagne.

The objective of this group includes "sending veterans, their family members and others to Vietnam to make a positive contribution, to reconcile with the Vietnamese and to relieve the distress of wartime experiences."

There have been 29 teams sent to Vietnam since the first team in 1989. One of our members from Chapter 223, Fred Ptucha and his wife Jeannette,

(Cont'd on page 3)



**VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA  
REDWOOD EMPIRE CHAPTER 223  
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA  
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**The "Here and Now" PTSD group, comprised mainly of Vietnam veterans, gather for the Peter Rusher memorial service on July 29th at Daniels Chapel of the Roses. Peter was highly recognized for wearing shorts, both summer and winter, as witnessed by his friends at his memorial. Peter was a member of VVA-223.**

**NOTICE**

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of VVA, Inc., National, State, Chapter 223, or the newsletter staff, but of the corresponding party. All articles by the Chapter have permission for reprint in all Vietnam Veterans of America newsletters. Anything else must come from the original source.

To make a contribution to the News and Views, submit a story, or a photograph, please call or email: Brooke McKusick @ 537-9003, or [mcq6@vbbn.com](mailto:mcq6@vbbn.com). To make a complaint about the newsletter, please call: Ken Holybee @ 887-8891, or [holybee@comcast.net](mailto:holybee@comcast.net)

VVA Chapter 223 invites you to place an ad in the News and Views, please call:

Lou Nunez @ 291-5314 or Brooke McKusick @ 537-9003  
A business card size ad in our newsletter is \$100.00 for a full year... With a 100% Tax Credit!

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# President's Letter



Ken Holybee

At this writing, summer is winding down. Santa Rosa Wednesday Night Market finished in August. Now we can get ready for Christmas. Can't believe I just wrote that!

Wednesday at the Santa Rosa Market has been a very good event. We have spoken to many people, a lot of them male and female veterans. There has been talk about how to locate female veterans and get them signed up with the VA, and get them involved with service organizations. I think the best way is to do what we have been doing, go to a place people go and talk to

people.

We have the air show coming up in September. Mark the 20th and 21st on your calendar to attend. If you wish to work our booth, you will need to contact me and attend a planning meeting. I think it will be on September 13th.

I hope everyone is talking about our dinner dance on October 11th. I know that everyone cannot attend but if you talk about it people will attend. It should be lots of fun. Remember last year when the Press Democrat had a photographer there? It is not often we get a full page of good press and don't pay for it. This year the food will be prepared on sight. If you enjoyed our Christmas dinner you will love this.

I attended the national leadership and education conference in Wichita, Kansas, this month. During the board meeting, I was elected to fill the vacancy on the national board, created by the passing of Pat Toro. Pat was a very dedicated and hard working board member and very active in his chapter. He will be missed by all. This position will take me to the national board meetings, and I will strive to do a good job in all areas.

On the home front, I am serving on the Sonoma County Veterans Housing Advisory Committee and trying to find out if the local VA is going to follow the Directives of the new Secretary of the VA.

(Cont'd on page 4)

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## Governor Brown Signs Levine Legislation to Bring Common Sense to Veterans Sentencing

*AB 2098 (Levine) Signed Into Law 28 July, 2014*

Today, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. signed into law AB 2098 (Levine) to require that courts consider service induced mental illness when sentencing Veterans.

"I thank Governor Brown for his support of our Veterans," said Assembly member Marc Levine (D-San Rafael). "Veterans dealing with PTSD deserve much more support and care than they are currently receiving. When they go without needed mental health treatment and then commit a crime, the courts must consider this fact prior to sentencing."

The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research indicates that less than half of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, who screen positive for PTSD, receive treatment.

By requiring the courts to consider service induced mental health problems prior to sentencing, AB 2098 appropriately recognizes the link between mental health problems, and increased incarceration rates.

AB 2098 (Chapter 163 of the Statutes 2014) takes effect January 1, 2015.

*Assembly member Levine represents the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, which includes Marin County and southern Sonoma County.*

(Cont'd from page 1)

## Vietnam

were among the latest work team that went over in April.

She supplied us with the great images of the trip.

Their work station centered around Dong Ha, a town ten kilometers south of the DMZ, and they worked in the remote villages in that area.

"We stayed in special quarters which were comfortable and in the morning our hosts would feed us, and a van would come and take us to the next work site," Ptucha explained. Most of the Vietnamese workers were skilled in construction work and the visitors from the U.S. served as laborers.

All the Vietnamese workers had lost a family member or were missing an arm or leg; or sustained some other traumatic injury in the fighting. "These people not only forgave us but also welcomed and honored us," he said.

Self-satisfaction is the payoff for Ptucha, who was a communication officer in the Navy and actually was one of the whistleblowers who was on the USS Turner-Joy when the phony Gulf of Tonkin Incident was staged, and triggered the U.S. escalation of another 500,000 troops into the Conflict.

"Working with these people has resulted in close relationships," Ptucha said. "I am now friends with my interpreter and many Vietnam fellow workers. We even built hooches for former Vietcong."

For those who want to get involved in this program you should know some details: It's usually teams of 8-12 who work on a project site. Members spend two-and-one-half weeks of work and then have time after to tour the country where they want to view.

Before teammates leave for Nam there is a mandatory 3-day orientation and team-building workshop in Sebastopol, Ca. The typical cost for the travel and expenses with the VVRP team is between \$3000-\$3500 per trip.

See pages 6 and 7 for lots of pictures...

# THE VVA 2014 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

By Charles Earthman

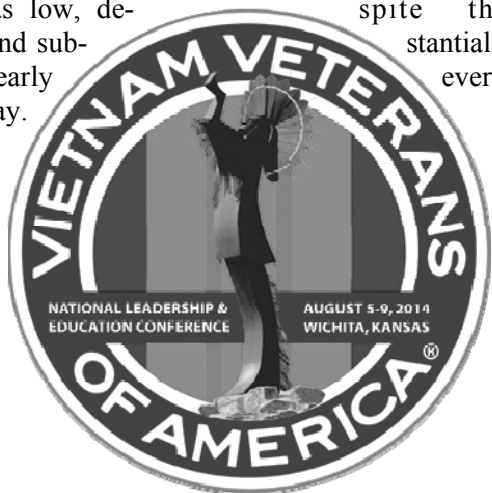
Wichita, Kansas, is just about in the geographical middle of the United States, "the Heartland." It was here, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on the banks of the Arkansas River, that veterans from coast to coast gathered for five days of educational seminars, networking, and exchanging of information.

The Vietnam Veterans of America's 2014 Leadership Conference was a successful leadership and education conference that featured seminars led by experts in their respective fields. The conference provided VVA chapters and state councils with important information that can be used to improve programs.

Lou Nunez and I were on hand. We attended several seminars where we obtained important information and knowledge to take back to Chapter 223 that will enhance programs we currently have in place and help implement new programs that could help our veteran community. Chapter President Ken Holybee and Kate O'Hare-Palmer were also in Wichita. Kate is the National Women Veterans Committee Chair and led a seminar on Health and Wellness and Alternatives for Pain Management. Ken Holybee was also there, having been just elected to an At-Large vacancy on the National Board of Directors.

We were able to meet and exchange notes on several occasions and on Friday evening we had dinner at the Anchor, a local eatery in Wichita that featured a unique menu of California cuisine and a large list of micro-brew beers, some from our own backyard. The seminars and networking gave us all lots of material to bring back to the Chapter, including information and contacts that we hope will help the Chapter and its members in the coming years.

On the advice of Ken Holybee, I took a walk along the Arkansas River outside of the Hyatt Hotel. The river was low, despite thunderstorms and substantial rainfall nearly every night of my stay.



It was a nice walk even though the temperature was in the 90's with high humidity. I was in search of the Wichita Veterans Memorial Park and I found it. The park was quite impressive, acknowledging all American military personal and branches of service that served in major conflicts going back to WWII. There was also an American Revolutionary War Memorial, Marine Corps League Memorial, US Navy Hospital Corps Memorial, US Merchant Marine Memorial, and a Military Order of the Purple Heart Memorial. It was very impressive.

On my last day in Wichita, I rented a car and took a drive through the Kansas countryside to Fort Riley. I wanted to see the Buffalo Soldier Memorial, a monument dedicated to black cavalry soldiers that served bravely on the plains in the late 1800's and early 1900's. They were also the first park rangers in Yosemite National Park, and despite legend, led the charge up Kettle Hill at the Battle of San Juan Heights in the Spanish American War (the credit was given to Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders). This was a nice way to spend the day and it was a pleasant ride through the Heartland, but the topography contrasted greatly with northern California and I found myself looking for even the slightest of hills on this vast, flat plain. It was an interesting trip, and I thoroughly enjoyed the Kansas landscape and the people I met along the way.



The 2014 VVA Leadership Conference was a good opportunity to learn and exchange ideas with other Vietnam Veterans. It's an experience I recommend to any Chapter member interested in veterans' issues and advocacy on the local, state, or national level. The next leadership conference will be in Tucson, Arizona, and I hope the Chapter will be well-represented. As for this conference, "Dorothy found the Wizard - and we all went home."

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## (Cont'd from page 2) **President's Letter**

Working with the Housing Advisory Committee, we are looking at housing for veterans in Sonoma County. We are looking at supportive, transitional, and low income housing. This is using the funds from Proposition 41 to assist the veterans in our area.

>>>>>



(Cont'd from page 4)

The last survey counted 400 veterans living on the streets in Sonoma County. This is not counting the people they could not locate or their families. Women veterans with children are now showing up in these counts. A large part of our task is to make sure the veterans benefit from this money.

With supportive housing the veterans get the assistance they need to be able to maintain a stable home. With this assistance they can become productive and eventually move on to make room for more veterans that need this assistance. Some seem to think this is a handout, but it is a hand up. Many veterans today suffer from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST) or other problems. Too many times in today's society when military members leave the service they have no place to go; no support like they enjoyed in the service. Some have no family to return to, and some have families that they are having trouble supporting. We all know how hard it is financially in our county and without some support it is easy to start falling.

The other part of what I am doing locally is asking the VA clinic to follow the directives of the secretary. This directive is that the VA Medical facilities will hold town hall meetings with the veterans in their area before the end of September. If they can have more than one that is better.

The clinic is also supposed to hold meetings with the leaders of the veterans' service organizations on a monthly basis. If we had these meetings we could discuss, in an open forum, how we can solve problems between the VA and the veterans. Many of the issues we face at the clinic can be resolved if there was someone that we could speak to. I have been told that I need to go to volunteer services, the patient advocate, or just go someplace else. I have not pushed the issue, but I have asked like any person looking for an answer. I have not received any positive communication from our clinic. I have been told that I can go to San Francisco and speak to them or become a member of some committee down at Fort Miley to answer my questions. I use the clinic in Santa Rosa, and like any other veteran that uses this facility, I would like my answers here.

## JOSEPH PAUL CHOLEWA

*by Mike Hart*

The Sonoma County Air Show that comes to the Charles Schulz Airport in Santa Rosa this month is a time of excitement, as well as a prodding of old time memories for veterans.

It is a special time for our VVA Chapter 223 as we provide scores of volunteers for the event as well as providing an informational booth and a place to raise funds by selling 'bucky-Duckies' to a large crowd.

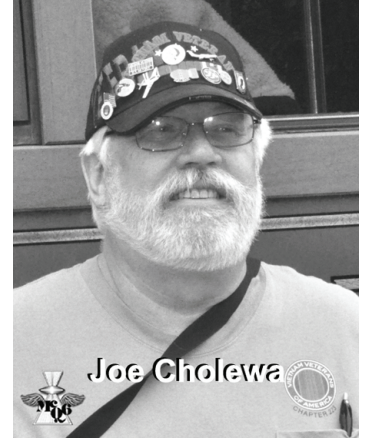
A main reason our chapter efforts go smoothly at the show is the omnipresence of Joseph (Joe) Cholewa, a life member who grew up with the Air Force and now serves as a liaison between VVA223 and the Sonoma County Air Museum. As a member of the museum he was assigned in 1997 to maintain an F5 Tiger2 jet fighter used in Vietnam. When the air show comes to town Joe is our guy at the airport.

The amiable gentle giant Joe, 67, joined the Air Force in Boston in 1966 and eventually became a transportation (cargo) technician. 'This included things like bombs, agent-orange, yeah, we were required HAZMAT training,' he said. He was sent to Kadena-Okinawa AFB where he spent 15 months before heading to Vietnam. His main bases in 'Nam were Cam Ranh Bay and Phan Rang.

'We were hit twice by enemy ground fire and no one was injured,' explained Joe. 'We would use flak jackets to sit on and that saved our asses. The worst part of my job was loading bodies onto planes and helicopters.'

Joe worked for the US Postal Service for over 25 years, starting as a mail carrier and ending his career as a staff employee.

His overall work for the chapter is not limited to his expertise at the airport. He steps in wherever he is needed even with his physical limitations. This includes working with the VVA 223 food distribution program, the furniture program for Vet Connect, sitting in at the coffee cart at the Santa Rosa VA Clinic or just giving some advice to a new VA client.



Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they are sexy.



*Photographs by  
Jeannette Dothee*



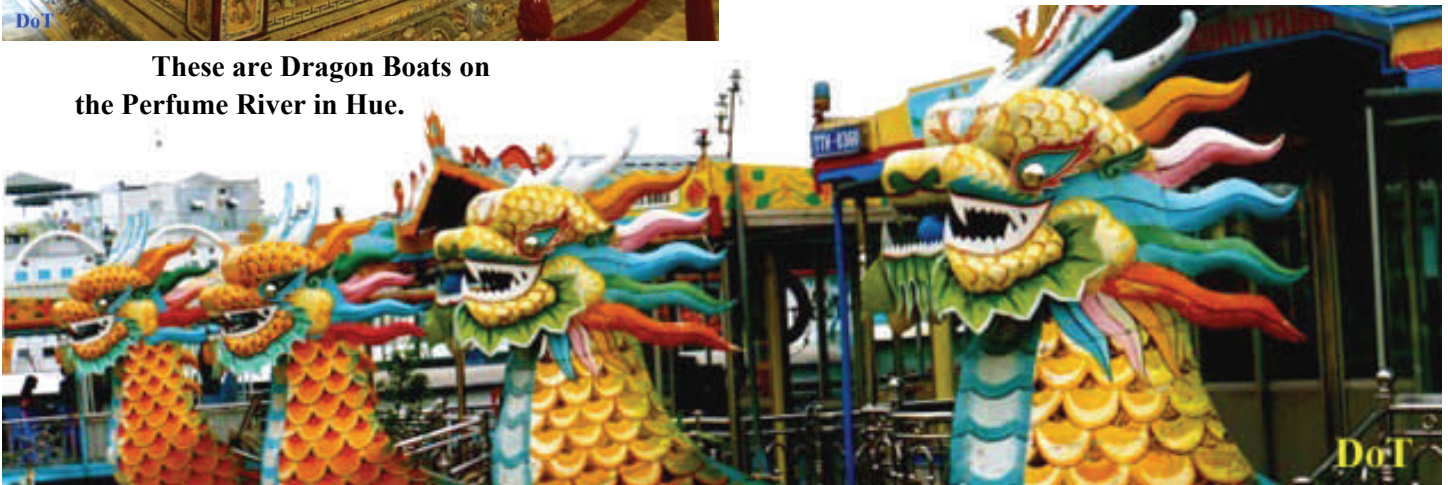
**Hạ Long Bay, "descending dragon bay," is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a popular travel destination, in Quảng Ninh Province, Vietnam. On the right is a picture taken from a cave in one of the more than 775 inlets in Hạ Long Bay.**



**This dragon is guarding the entrance to the Minh Mang Tomb, up the Perfume River from Hue, and to the left is the interior of the Minh Mang Tomb.**



**These are Dragon Boats on the Perfume River in Hue.**







**Clockwise from above:**

**Another beautiful beach located on National Route 1A between the Hải Vân Pass, "ocean cloud pass," and Da Nang. Temple in Hoi An.**

**Young woman wearing the traditional Ao Dai.**

**The lighted Red Bridge over Trúc Bạch Lake in Hanoi.**

**A lantern decorated street in Hoi An, south of Da Nang.**



***Vietnam - 2014***





# LISTEN UP!

I hope that headline got your attention. I am speaking to everyone who is within driving distance of the Vet Building and to every able bodied member who can help. Now is the time to come to the aid of your chapter, VVA-223.

Lou Nunez is working very hard to make the Dinner Dance fund raiser even bigger and better than last year. The success of this event depends on many factors, and the most important contribution just may be your participation.

You can help by selling tickets. You can help by assisting with one of the committees. Of course, you can help by just being there!

For information on how to volunteer or purchase tickets, please call Lou Nunez at 291-5314 or Angie Hand at 494-4686. Every little bit helps!

Let's make this the best Dinner Dance ever !!!



## Third Annual Dinner and Dance



**Vietnam Veterans of America  
Santa Rosa Chapter #223**

*Invites you to the third annual  
Dinner and Dance*

**Saturday, October 11, 2014**

**Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building  
1351 Maple Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA  
Dinner and Dance \$25 per person**

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**For more information visit us at:**

**www.VVA-223.ORG**

VVA Chapter #223 is a 501 (c)19 Non-Profit Veterans Corporation  
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## *In Memoriam*



**Peter Charles Rusher**

**November 19, 1950 to July 23, 2014**

## **SONOMA COUNTY VET CONNECT**

**Veterans Drop In Center  
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Every Tuesday - 9 am to noon  
Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building  
1351 Maple Avenue, Santa Rosa  
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**Information, Assistance and Referrals  
VA Health Care, Veterans Benefits - Counseling for  
Veterans and their Families, Housing  
And Employment Counseling**

**Phone 707-387-5623**

These services are, also, available at the Veterans Memorial Buildings in **Guerneville** on the 2nd Thursday, **Sonoma** on the 3rd Thursday, and **Petaluma** on the 4th Thursday of every month. Please note the time schedule for these resource and service meetings is: Noon to 3 pm

**ALL VETERANS ARE WELCOME  
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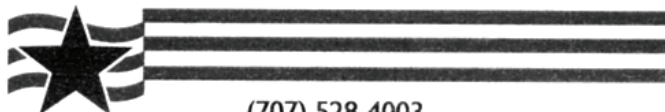
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**Dan McCaskell Ph.D.**  
CVE, CRC, CCM



(707) 528-4003

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## Assembly member Skinner's Bill Helping Veterans Reintegrate Signed Into Law

**SACRAMENTO**—A bill authored by Assembly member Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) that will help formerly incarcerated veterans gain access to the physical, mental health or substance abuse services that they are entitled to through their military service was signed into law today.

"It is common sense to help incarcerated veterans reintegrate into society without reoffending," said Assembly member Skinner. "Some of our veterans come back from war with serious problems and end up behind bars. We owe it to them to help get their lives back on track by making sure they get access to the services they are guaranteed by virtue of their service to our country."

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) assesses every inmate prior to release. This process helps place inmates in programs designed to aid their reentry to society and reduce recidivism. The unique set of difficulties veterans face and the military services available to them are currently not being considered by CDCR, however.

Veterans are more likely to be homeless, or live in overcrowded or substandard housing. Veterans are also more likely to live in poverty, lack support networks common to civilians, and suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder. Assembly member Skinner's bill, AB 2357, will go into effect on January 1, 2015, and will require the CDCR to consider an inmate's service in the United States military when conducting its standard assessment to help ensure that veterans gain access to services that will help them reintegrate into society.



**Get  
Down,  
Do  
The  
Write  
Thing**

Over the years, you've heard the call for volunteers, both at our meetings and in this newsletter. Helping at the Air Show, interacting at the Wednesday night market, selling with the ducky brigade, and working on the Dinner-Dance. The list goes on and on. We, as a big ol' group of volunteers, get involved in a lot of activities. But, you know there is going to be a "but", we also want to hear from you!

Well, I'm getting to the crux of the matter, slowly. It's safe to say that talk and interaction with one another is quite fluid in our chapter. That is one of the things that makes getting involved so interesting. I've heard some pretty good stories floated around from time to time.

I would like to ask you, you the individual, to write some of your war stories or thoughts down on paper. **We would like to have you become a contributor to the newsletter.** Write about what you know... a car show, a ducky do-good story ( you know, like the lady who donated money for Monte Bernardo ), or about a guy you met at Fort Miley. You may even want to lampoon the VA.

If you write it, we'll publish it. Remember, like on the Internet, you want to write in a style that your mother would be proud to read. We'll help you with spelling and grammar if needed. So get it down on paper or into your computer ... You can hand it off to Ken Holybee or Brooke McKusick. We'll work on it with you!



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**NBVRC provides supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in, or transitioning into, permanent housing. The employment workshop is free. Veterans can obtain career training.**

**NBVRC operates Hearn House, a behavioral health treatment program that provides comprehensive treatment and housing for male veterans.**

### **SONOMA COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE**

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Westwind Boulevard is located near the Charles M. Schulz (Sonoma County) Airport. From Highway 101: Exit Airport Boulevard, turn left on Westwind Blvd. and right into the building's parking lot. Check Sonoma County Transit Airport route 62 & 64 for bus schedule.

P. O. Box 4059, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

***Please call to schedule an appointment.***





## CHAPTER 223 GENERAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 16, 2014 BE THERE EARLY!!!

**REDWOOD GOSPEL MISSION -  
HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM** - Every  
Monday evening @ 5:30 pm. **101 6th Street, Santa  
Rosa.**

**SONOMA COUNTY VET CONNECT -**  
Every Tuesday morning, 9:00 am to noon @ the  
VETS building. Vets helping vets solve problems.  
Coffee and donuts served. See page 10.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING -**  
Second Tuesday of the month, 1:00 pm @ the VETS  
building.

**VVA-223 GENERAL MEETING** - Third  
Tuesday of the month. **POTLUCK @ SIX.** Meeting  
starts at 7 PM. See above...

**FOOD-GIVE-AWAY PROGRAM** - Fourth  
Tuesday of the month. Volunteers will please check  
in with **John McGivney @ 575.5261** for time and  
station.

**POKER SCHEDULE** - Cards in the air at  
6:00 pm. Check-in and pizza 5:00 to 5:55 pm...  
Usually the first Saturday of the month... **September  
6th, October 4th, November 1st, December 6th.**

**VVA 223 PHOTOGRAPHS on SHUTTERFLY**  
<http://vva223photographs.shutterfly.com>

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# COMIC'S CORNER

"Alex Trebek has broken a world record for game-show hosts, after hosting 6,829 shows in his career. When asked how he's made it through so many shows, Trebek said, 'What is Scotch?'" -- Jimmy Fallon

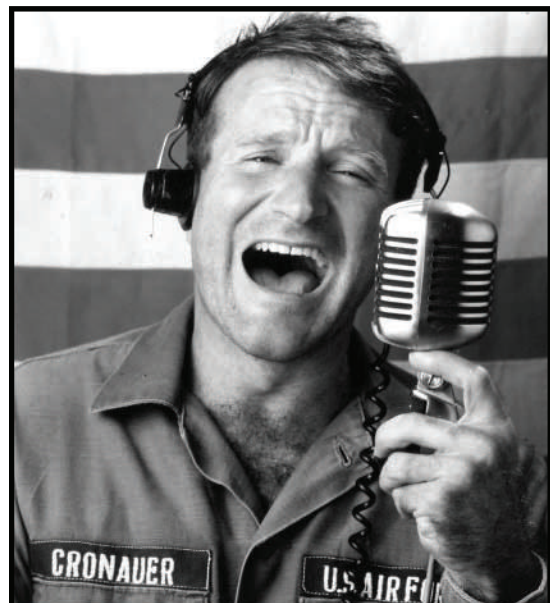
"Sometimes I get the feeling the whole world is against me, but deep down I know that's not true. Some smaller countries are neutral." -- Robert Orben

"There is a new perfume called Cheeteau that smells like Cheetos. Because what woman doesn't want to attract a man who gets turned on by the smell of Cheetos?" -- Alex Kaseberg

"This week in New York, police arrested a man who tried to steal 43 sticks of underarm deodorant from a drug-store. This man is being described as 'not European.'" -- Conan O'Brien

With all this talk of adding Puerto Rico as the 51st state, I feel like our new goal number should be 53 states. A prime number. "One nation, indivisible..."

## In Memoriam



***Robin Williams***

**July 21, 1951 - August 11, 2014**



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**With the Wednesday Night Market winding down from it's summer run, the members of VVA 223 had an excellent adventure. The ducky brigade had a great time talking to kids and parents, selling a ducky or two along the way... Now it's time to get ready for the Air Show.**

